

Ventura County's DMC Initiative



The Ventura County Probation Agency was one of the seven counties awarded the Disproportionate Minority Contact-Technical Assistance Project II (DMC-TAP II) grant in 2009. Ventura quickly assigned a Supervising Deputy Probation Officer, Rosa Lopez, as the DMC Coordinator and immediately contracted with expert consultant W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI) for technical support. A DMC collaborative was formed and given that Ventura was an existing Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) site, it was not difficult for them to obtain support from existing stakeholders. The collaborative is comprised of approximately 16 government and private organizations, including courts, probation, law enforcement, juvenile justice partners and community based organizations.

In 2010, following a data analysis conducted by BI, regarding bookings and youth of color, it was determined that warrants and violations of probation (VOP's) were the top two offenses resulting in detention. This became Ventura's target population. Latinos made up 60% of all technical/administrative violations. Also, the cost to the Agency for pre-adjudication detention of youth for VOP's was approximately \$736,560.

The DMC Collaborative, co-chaired by Chief Probation Officer Mark Varela and Presiding Juvenile Court Judge Manuel Covarrubias, began digging deeper into the VOP's. The group met monthly for over a year and subcommittees were formed to help with DMC efforts.

The BI conducted a further analysis and that data revealed that 57% of all VOP detentions were from the juvenile specialty courts and that the majority of notice of charges included only two violations. When one condition was violated, the majority of the cases were "other drug" related.

After over a year of reviewing the target population, the listed reasons for bookings, conducting several site visits to evening reporting centers (ERC) and the recommendation from BI, the collaborative agreed that an ERC was needed. Youth would be referred to the center as an alternative to incarceration for those struggling to comply with their Court ordered obligations and at risk of being returned to custody. Youth would attend school during the day and then report to the center during the evening hours. The ERC would also serve a graduated response to hold youth accountable, yet empower them with knowledge and skills they may need to break the cycle of recidivism.

The collaborative

asked key questions:

- 1.) What was the racial and ethnic breakdown for youth detained for VOP's?
- 2.) What was the gender breakdown?
- 3.) Which unit was the youth assigned to at the time of the detention for VOP?
- 4.) What was the length of stay for VOP's?
- 5.) How many violations were attached to the booking?
- 6.) What were the types of violations?

Juvenile field probation supervisors were also asked to rank the reasons they authorized administrative bookings.

During the summer of 2012, when existing Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funds became available, Chief Varela successfully convinced (using the data and information mentioned) the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) that the extra funds be allocated for an ERC. The rest is history....

In April 2013, the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Oxnard and Port Hueneme (BGCOP) was awarded funding for the development of the ERC and they began accepting referrals in early May 2013. The timing could not have been any better. The BGCOP had recently converted an existing site into a teen center.



Judge Covarrubias strongly believes, *"family and community engagement in supporting our youth is essential to improving the lives of our youth and their families. Connecting our youth and their family with positive pro-social activity centers that exist in their community will hopefully provide a positive outlet for our youth and their families to make and maintain the connection with the services that exist in their community."*

The ERC operates from 3-8 p.m. It serves youth between the ages of 12 1/2 -18. Referrals are made by probation and not ordered by the Court. Youth are referred to participate in the program from 20-45 business days and the period will depend on their individual needs. The services include: transportation, tutoring, education and career development, cooking, leadership courses, health and life skills, sports/fitness/recreation, arts, and field trips. The ultimate goal is for these youth to develop a positive connection and continue attending even when not directed to do so by probation.

Chief Varela hopes *"youth will break the cycle of delinquency by participating in community based interventions that are designed to provide a wide range of services and approaches that encourage pro-social behavior and activities. The BGCOP creates a safe environment that surrounds each youth with caring adults, positive engagement, and clear paths to success."* Most importantly, Ventura anticipates that by referring youth to the ERC it will not only reduce the number of youth arrested for violations of probation, but also reduce the number of Latino youth incarcerated in their juvenile facility.

Youth are not the only ones who have been changed by this grant and collaborative process. Booking Officer John Doleman talks about his experience working with the BI and his own personal transformation. <http://www.burnsinstitute.org/article.php?id=324>

